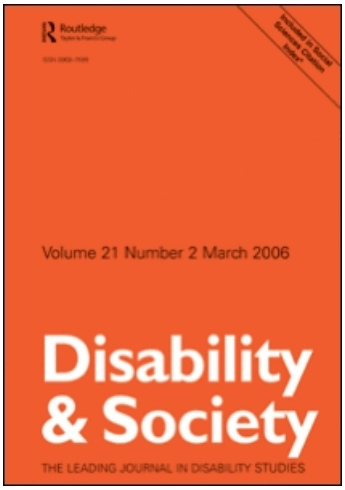

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Legitimating school segregation. The special education profession and the discourse of learning disability in Germany

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Legitimating school segregation. The special education profession and the discourse of learning disability in Germany

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School segregation continues to be understood as legitimate in Germany. To explain why, we chart the development of the learning disability discourse and the special education profession, providing insights into the ongoing expansion of segregated special schooling. The discourse analysis of articles published between 1908 and 2004 in the special education professional association journal, *Zeitschrift für Heilpädagogik*, uncovers the knowledge base of special education that led to the rise of its main category, 'learning disability,' and school type, the support school (then: *Hilfsschule*, now: *Förderschule*). Despite critical junctures over the twentieth century, special education's dominant discourse and school structures exhibit remarkable continuity. We find professional authority with respect to 'learning disability' is a key factor in the persistence and continued growth of segregated special education. Scientific discourse continues to legitimate the classification of pupils as 'learning disabled' and their subsequent allocation to segregated schools.

Keywords: special education; profession; discourse; learning disability; special schools; segregation; inclusive education; Germany

Points of interest

- In Germany, half a million pupils (around 6% of all pupils of compulsory school age) attend not a regular school, but a segregated special school, where they are unlikely to attain a qualified school-leaving certificate.
- Special educators have taught pupils mainly from poor families in special schools for as long as anyone can remember.
- In the past, learning disability was talked about as a form of poverty, yet today it is viewed in terms of individual 'abnormality' and deficit – to be compensated or treated in special schools that 'protect' pupils.
- The German special education profession and its associations have a strong interest to continue teaching in special schools: they have always done so and they enjoy well-paid jobs with high status and autonomy.
- In contrast to these segregated schools, inclusive classrooms provide space in which teachers and all kinds of pupils learn together.

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Persistent school segregation

Despite ratification in 2009 of the International Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UN 2006), which demands inclusive education, school segregation continues to be understood as legitimate in Germany. Contrary to this international charter, the special education profession and the discourse of learning disability bolster the special school system in Germany, whose segregated structures have expanded and differentiated over the past century. Examining this conflict between global intentions and national persistence, we analyze the institutionalization of 'special' education as segregated (on the controversy and meaning associated with the word 'special' in the context of disability, see Adams, Swain, and Clark 2000). Charting the discourse of learning disability provides insights into special education's development and the resulting legitimacy that contributes to the maintenance of school segregation throughout educational systems in Germany. We focus on learning disability discourse and knowledge, the special education profession, and the expansion of its main school type – the support school (*Hilfsschule; Förderschule*).

How was 'learning disability' constructed as an objective, scientific reality that facilitated the special education profession's establishment of segregated special schools and stabilizes the status quo by legitimating these school structures? The perspective taken here sheds light on the taken-for-granted knowledge, interests, strategies, and influence of experts in special education. We analyze scientific and professional discourses to uncover how 'learning disability' developed over the twentieth century in a country that pioneered special education. Examining this process of knowledge production enables a critique of the discourses and practises of experts that can help to establish inclusive knowledge and practises (Allan 2005).

Through an analysis of articles in the special education professional association journal *Zeitschrift für Heilpädagogik* from 1908 to 2004 in Germany, we show how specific knowledge about learning disability and the constitution of the segregated special school type interacted, strengthening both and contributing to the persistence of school segregation up to the present day. We explore the persistence of segregated schooling and the dominance of the 'learning disability' category in the German context by examining historical and contemporary debates about special and inclusive education. How has 'learning disability' been discussed and defined over time? What arguments led to the legitimacy of segregated special education for those pupils considered to have 'learning disabilities'? We embed this discussion in an analysis of the twentieth-century development of Germany's elaborate special school system, among the most highly differentiated in the world (see Powell 2011). We argue that Germany presents an ideal case to uncover the connection between professional knowledge and school structures that manifests the myriad negative consequences of segregation for the biographies and life chances of classified pupils (see Pfahl 2011). While many countries' education systems have become more inclusive, Germany's remains overwhelmingly segregative. Thus, we trace the arguments that led to its construction. Examining the rise to power of the special education profession and its knowledge base provides a crucial source for the 'unmasking and recognition' of learning disability as 'unexplained underachievement' (Carrier 1983) and the discursive basis of special education practices and the legitimacy of special schooling to contain school failure (see Skrtic 1991).

Over a century, 'learning disability' ('*Lernbehinderung*') has risen to become the largest category of special educational support in Germany. Yet the significance

of this category for the analysis presented here rests not only in quantitative prevalence but also in its status as an ideal type of 'the disabled subject' resulting from participation in a highly inegalitarian stratified and segregated education system (Pfahl 2011). As a school-based category that only exists in the relationship of individual pupils to socially derived educational standards and behavioural norms, it is a relative status. Without a clear etiology, this category is based on a range of genetic, biological, and social factors (see Sternberg and Spear-Swerling 1999). Yet in Germany, it has been closely related to but more specific than general notions of educational and social disadvantage. This category has long been school professionals' most official and authoritative way of indicating and responding to social disadvantage and its negative consequences for learning (e.g., Marquardt 1975; Wocken 2000). This has legitimized not only specific supports but also selection out of general schools.

Although the debate about school integration and segregation has been a continuous feature of special education discourse, the path taken toward full-time school segregation began with the establishment of the organizationally autonomous *Hilfsschule*. This developmental path – with self-reinforcing feedback typical of school organizational forms once established – continues to the present day (Powell 2009). Here, we argue that the tenacity of this school segregation relies on the professional power that developed on the basis of special education knowledge and discourses, which called for the organizational form of the special school to address student body heterogeneity and low individual school performance. The resulting *Hilfsschule* then became the model upon which the subsequent special school expansion, especially from the 1960s onwards, was based.

The category of learning disability and its school form (now called the *Förderschule*) lies at the nexus of special and general education. This relationship is unavoidable because special educators rely on general educators to identify special needs and transfer pupils to their schools. If widespread school segregation is to be reduced – as called for by international charters as well as legislation in the European Union and in Germany – the profession must shift its knowledge base and discourse away from individual 'deficits' and 'treatments' available only in special schools. In the place of school segregation as the most legitimate response, diverse concepts that guide individual educational planning and support within general schools (integration) and inclusive schooling would need to be implemented. These have, thus far, remained marginal, despite Germany's Education Council (*Bildungsrat*) calling for such educational environments already in the 1980s, a presage of contemporary international discourses. Yet this did not lead to a paradigmatic shift of deconstructing segregated facilities in favour of inclusive classrooms that serve diverse pupils. Thus, to understand the tenacious legitimacy of school segregation, Germany presents a useful case.

We proceed as follows. We briefly describe the German (special) educational system, and discuss the method, data, and archive of the discourse and historical analyses conducted. Then, we chart the strands of the discourse of learning disability from 1908–2008. We find considerable continuity across time despite massive critical junctures such as World War II or German reunification in 1990. Finally, we place the findings in the context of an educational system that, while an early innovator in compulsory schooling and special education, has yet to fully acknowledge, much less complete, the global paradigm shift to inclusive education for all (see Richardson and Powell 2011).

Special schools within differentiated and stratified educational systems

Germany affords itself educational systems with stratified secondary school types – such as *Hauptschule*, *Realschule*, *Gesamtschule*, and *Gymnasium* – leading to different post-secondary educational and training opportunities, occupations, and wage levels. Parallel to this differentiated general education system, Germany's states (*Länder*) also maintain some of the most highly differentiated special education systems in the world (Powell 2011). While nationally there are only nine 'categories of educational support' (*Förderschwerpunkte*) across the 16 *Länder*, separate types of schools continue to provide specific learning environments, based on age-old impairment categories congruent with medical, clinical or individual deficit models of disability. Thus, while the national classification system implemented in 1994 embraces a pedagogical paradigm of individual learning supports, this has not led to the closure of segregated special schools. Pupils are selected into special school types at a very early age – mostly around the age of 10 years as they transition from primary to secondary schooling; the vast majority of pupils that attend special schools then remain in this school type for the duration of their school careers (see Powell 2011). They often transition into 'special' vocational training programmes, which do not markedly improve their chances of receiving an apprenticeship or in finding work (see Pfahl 2011).

In Germany as a whole, about 1 in 20 pupils of compulsory school age are classified as 'having special educational needs' (*Sonderpädagogischer Förderbedarf*) (KMK 2008). In terms of educational outcomes, approximately 80% of special school-leavers each year receive no secondary school credential, which would qualify them to go on to postsecondary education (KMK 2008). This lack of qualification disadvantages and stigmatizes them and thwarts their long-term social and political participation. Thus, the German special school system has been criticized nationally and internationally for failing to provide educational opportunities or to sufficiently compensate for these pupils' disadvantages (e.g., Muñoz 2007). Indeed, the reality in Germany contrasts starkly to international inclusion rhetoric. Since reunification in 1990, ever more children and youth have been diagnosed with 'special educational needs' (particularly in the five eastern *Länder*); the majority classified in the category 'learning disability'. Despite considerable variation across *Länder*, the national segregation rate remains above 80% (KMK 2008). Our analysis reveals the contribution of special education professionals' discursive construction of 'learning disability' – as requiring 'special treatment' in the 'protective space' (*Schonraum*) of special schools – to this status quo.

Discourse analysis: methods, data and archive

In a mixed-methods research project, a range of quantitative and qualitative data and interpretive methods where used to analyze special education over the twentieth century in Germany. Its disabling effects on youth transitioning from special schools into training programs and into the labour market are discussed elsewhere as 'technologies of the disabled self' (Pfahl 2011). Here, we reconstruct how the 'learning disability' (*Lernbehinderung*) discourse developed in Germany and thus structured the profession and practice of special education. Ultimately, this led to the linkage of arguments that constructed a new category of pupils and a unique school form that would expand dramatically over the twentieth century.

Therapeutic or remedial pedagogy (*Heilpädagogik*) or special education (*Sonderpädagogik*) simultaneously constructed the category 'learning disability' and special schools established to serve pupils professionals so defined. The existence of

specific organizational forms (here: segregated schools) is legitimated by disciplinary discourses (see Foucault 1972, 1978). As McIntosh (2002, 78) has argued in a Foucaultian analysis of British special education, 'the field of learning disability is linked by a number of classifications that combine to place the client, professional and agency within a particular space of social identity.'

Foucault defines a discourse as a 'distribution of statements' or as a 'system of diffusion' (Foucault 1972). Discourses can be understood as networks of declarations, in which scientific theories, normative arguments, classification systems, institutionalized pathways, empirical evidence and forms of intervention are synthesized and bolster each other. The term 'statements' refers to solitary events in which someone says, writes, calculates, demands or communicates something. These elements coalesce into the 'statements' of a discourse, which are repeated contents and formats expressed by diverse actors in similar contexts. Such 'statements' are, in a discourse analysis, interpreted in light of a research question and their genesis is reconstructed (Keller 2005, 72). The objects of a discourse – that which is understood as reality and becomes the object of description – are constructed in processes of reciprocal 'typification' (Berger and Luckmann 1966). These objects are reproduced over time and, in turn, can be comprehensively transformed. By changing the object, a discourse provides historically flexible subject positions to those individuals concerned (Waldschmidt 2005). Thus, the unity and power of a discourse is not built on the permanence of an object or the meaning made by one or a few actors, but rather on the space of statements in which an object finds its form and changes itself (see Foucault 1972).

The utilized text archive was constructed mainly from selected articles in issues of the journal of Germany's professional association of special educators. The *Journal of Therapeutic Pedagogy* (*Zeitschrift für Heilpädagogik*) has been published under various names since the founding of the association: it was first published in 1908 as the 'The Support School' (*Die Hilfsschule*), was published as 'The German Support School' (*Die Deutsche Hilfsschule*) even during the Nazi regime from 1933 to 1945, and had a sister publication in East Germany published as 'The Special School' (*Die Sonderschule*) from 1949 to 1990. Further sources include the 1974 Report of the Education Council of the Standing Conference of *Länder* Culture Ministers (*Kultusministerkonferenz*, KMK) – stating the principles upon which the educational policies and systems of the *Länder* are based and guided by recommendations. This document was analyzed because it is referred to and commented on often by later authors. For the contemporary period, articles again from the *Zeitschrift für Heilpädagogik* from the years 2000–2004 were evaluated, along with the recent society-wide debate over inclusive education due largely to international pressure by the United Nations (Muñoz 2007; UN 2006). This archive was constructed in order to show the historical development of what has been understood as 'learning disability' in special education's scholarly texts.

In sampling the material, the focus was on the dominant discourse, that relating to school segregation. From the beginning, there has also been a counter discourse, that of integration. While of growing importance, this discourse has not succeeded in dislodging the dominant position of the segregation discourse. Thus, the focus here is on the evolution of a discourse that has repeatedly asserted itself, with consequences for Germany's educational systems, educational policies, school organizations as well as for education professionals and their practice.

Marked by the debates surrounding the maintenance and defence of special education as well as critical junctures in German history, we mainly discuss three historical

periods. The first, foundational phase of special education reached its high point at the beginning of the twentieth century. The second phase examined here is the professionalization and differentiation of special education in the 1960s and, during the following decade, major educational system reforms. The final phase treated here is the contemporary discourse in the first decade of the twenty-first century. The chosen historical periods have been identified as distinct phases in the formation of special education professionalization (Hänsel 2005) as well as the debate surrounding segregation and integration. The decades not explicitly discussed here include Germany's first democracy, the Weimar Republic (1918–33), and the 'restoration' of special education discourse and praxis after the Second World War (see Möckel 1988; Ellger-Rüttgardt 2007). Importantly, after 1945 there was a remarkable continuity in special education professional practice in both Germanys – despite the different economic, political and social foundations in these countries (see Poore 2007). We thus focus mostly on the early and most recent institutionalization processes.

The foundational phase marked the construction of important building blocks of professional perspectives and practices. During the 1970s and onwards, special education was challenged to respond to change in education policies and to the demand for more integration of disabled pupils by parental groups (certainly not all) and vocal sections of the disability movement. The contemporary period reflects professional strategies to react to vociferous global and local demands for more school integration and inclusive education (see Powell 2009, 2011). Findings from internationally comparative studies of school performance and the reports of international non-governmental organizations (e.g., the World Bank, see Peters 2003) have placed further pressure on Germany's segregated educational system, whose legitimacy has been called into question (Muñoz 2007), especially given the life course consequences of stigma and segregation (Pfahl 2011). Thus, the aim of this analysis is to interpret discourses leading to the construction of 'learning disability,' the legitimacy of the special schools as separate school types, and the framing of identities and individual subjectivity within special education. How have discourses and professional knowledge influenced the expansion of special education and segregative school practices?

The special education profession and learning disability discourse in Germany, 1908–2008

In the following we focus on the history of 'learning disability' and the special education profession in Germany. Especially in the early texts, the 'abnormal' and especially weakened physical condition of support school pupils was described as 'idiocy', 'weakness', or as 'feebleness' of mind and body, resulting from the social and hygienic conditions that produced poverty and widespread illness. Bodily feebleness and feeblemindedness were viewed as interconnected. Thus, support school pedagogy implemented specific measures, such as offering a daily 'milk breakfast' and a weekly bath to strengthen the children in body and spirit. By compensating for the disadvantages brought on by poverty, special educators sought to create conditions conducive for learning and thus to protect and support their pupils. It is this charitable and caring stance that ultimately produced the notion of the 'protective space' (*Schonraum*), in which pupils are to be shielded from societal expectations. In Germany, in contrast to Britain, most special education professionals continue to be 'paternalisers' and not 'normalisers,' to use the two main groups contrasted by Deeley (2002) in her study of professional ideologies and learning disability.

In the beginning, special education was constructed as an 'add-on' to the primary school (*Volksschule*). Increasingly, however, support schools were founded in larger cities and industrial centres. The advantages and disadvantages of such developments were often discussed, especially in the first decade of the twentieth century (see, e.g., Dannemann 1911). Furthermore, some special educators have always recognized that segregated schooling and vocational training exclude special school leavers from the 'normal' labour market, forcing them into precarious social situations (see Hofmann 1930 on the structural disadvantage special school leavers face in school-to-work transitions).

Increasing attempts to teach all children – thus to universalize compulsory schooling – reduced the complete exclusion of children deemed by primary school teachers to be 'ineducable'. Indeed, special educators' establishment of the support schools, legitimated as missionary work, provided schooling to children previously considered ineducable. Therapeutic pedagogy thus founded itself as a holistic, healing, and integrative pedagogy of those children previously thought not to be 'teachable' in the crowded schools of the day. At the 1920 German Reich school conference (*Reichsschulkonferenz*), special education achieved the status of a separate division of practitioners, marking their successful drive for recognition. Acknowledgment of their area of expertise resulted in enhanced autonomy and, ultimately, better pay than many other teacher groups.

As we discuss below, throughout its professionalization project, special educators in Germany would return to variants of the foundational argument of a socially, morally, and clinically 'conspicuous' (*auffällig*) or exceptional pupil. Beyond medical expertise, the psychological gaze on the individual child and the boundaries of her or his intellectual capacities would be routinely brought into the discourse and praxis of 'therapeutic pedagogy'.

The methods to measure and diagnose intellectual dis/abilities, developed by Binet and Simon (1916) in the early 1900s as intelligence tests, became a key scientific pillar for special education in Germany as it did in many other countries, especially the United States. This and other psychometric instruments, based on statistical measurement techniques, established the notion of an 'average' or 'normal' intellect and thus also of 'abnormal' or deviant intellectual capacity in the German discourse, as it did in much of the English-speaking world (see Davis 1997). The perspective of psychology on the individual child in comparison to the 'average' child thus became significant, producing the representation of a pupil whose intellect is 'abnormally' developed. This view transformed the support school pupil from an impoverished, sick or fragile child into an 'abnormal' child, which the statistical normal distribution shows can be found on the margins of every society, in every school and classroom, because its very essence is the identification of marginal groups. In Germany as elsewhere, this interpretation is still today a taken-for-granted disciplinary foundation. Psychological theories and measurement techniques have been and continue to be integrated into the discourse of learning disability. Psychologists become a part of the group of experts who diagnose and determine the 'need of a child to attend a support school' (*Hilfsschulbedürftigkeit*). Who becomes classified and into which categories always depends on those who identify, assess, diagnose, and classify pupils: measurements are themselves based on the goals and decisions of those in control of 'special' educational processes (see Tomlinson 1982).

The twentieth century brought elaborated classification systems and more differentiated school systems, and special educators were trained to work in support

schools, in special classes and in asylums, with specialties based on types of children and youth, defined according to the categories of the day (Hofsäss 1993). The categories of the clinical disciplines were then integrated into institutionalized practices as they were applied to clients in existing organizations (see Pfahl 2008). In Germany, this occurred along the lines of separate school types. Furthermore, the school-based and even higher education training programs of special educators have been oriented to impairment categories and/or the types of 'special' schools developed to serve these children and youth. How professionals interpret and use such categories has a lasting impact on the decision-making process of teachers who are responsible for identifying who, when and where individual pupils are referred, assessed, diagnosed and classified (see Kottmann 2006).

Already present in the very early publications and debates, psychology increasingly became a major stream of educational discourse. From the 1970s to 1990s in Germany, a polarizing debate about 'psychologization' took place. Critics argued that the focus on the individual had hidden the collective social situation of this group within the class system of a capitalist society (on the class basis of the learning disability category, see, e.g., Begemann [1970] for Germany; Carrier [1986] for the US). They instead called for integration, based on the principle that all children can learn and grow, regardless of their social background. Some authors such as Hiller (1989) saw in educational expansion a negative aspect in that socially disadvantaged youth would have difficulty meeting the rising standards in schooling and vocational training. Most recently, with the rise of internationally comparative studies of school performance, Germany has witnessed a further strengthening of educational psychology, its performance and competence measurements, and standardization (Pfahl and Powell 2005).

Special education in Germany, taught in educational colleges and universities, can be understood as a 'secondary discipline' (Stichweh 1994). It is characterized by a weak client orientation and strong professional procedures and modes of operation based on psychological and medical diagnostics as part of scientific and professional procedures and a stalwart orientation to the organizational forms in the separate special school system. The focus on school performance and learning of classified groups of 'difficult' or 'abnormal' pupils continues in contemporary discourses of special education. These have differentiated categories of 'support' and also call for the inclusion of special school pupils in tests of school performance, which would ideally increase the accountability of special education for pupil achievement and attainment. By the 1970s, intellectually disabled children and youth were considered 'practically educable' (*praktisch bildbar*) and thus were offered public schooling; however, most often they have attended segregated special schools.

In the 1980s, once again with the parallel development of professional specialization and special school types, a specialty relating to behaviour and emotional disturbance was established. Such differentiation of special education's classification system – and the corresponding special schools – was based on procedures that quantitatively and qualitatively recognize and measure abilities in graduated steps. These procedures and categories are used to classify pupils according to their developmental level, their adaptability to the normal school and learning situations, but also depending on their family's resources. Contrary to empirical research results, many parents and educators continue to assume that 'normal' school conditions demand too much of some pupils and that 'normal' pupils are hindered in their learning by the presence and needs of classmates diagnosed as 'having special educational needs.' This argument, used to authorize the establishment of separate special schools at the beginning of the twentieth

century, continues to function as legitimation for the segregation of pupils who, given the organization of schooling, have not been sufficiently supported to reach their learning goals in general schools.

As elsewhere, German general and special education developed in parallel. However, both assume that by differentiating pupils by age and performance levels according to an ascribed innate quantity of talent (*Begabung*), relatively homogenous classes can be formed and these offer the best possible learning conditions. Selections from the Recommendations of the German Education Council (1966–1975), reflect this dominant perspective, which viewed different school forms as the appropriate response to differences in learning development of children and youth. As Heyl (1998) has emphasized, parental grass-roots organizations in Germany since the 1970s attempted to counter the school segregation of their disabled children by establishing model school integration projects, but that wide-scale resistance to integration – the defence of special schools – hampered such efforts.

Today, school integration and inclusive education continue to face a host of barriers, the most concrete of which are the existing school structures. In particular, the stratified general secondary school types and the sovereignty of the *Länder* in educational matters resist wholesale reform (see Below [2002] on considerable differences in the 16 educational systems). Further, the interests of those who work in well-resourced schools and earn higher salaries than general schoolteachers hinder change, as does the lack of political will to redirect funding and professional talent from special schools to inclusive education programs. Indeed, the institutional logic of dividing pupils among separate school types according to their ability level pervades the German educational system (Powell 2009). By contrast, inclusive education fundamentally calls such structures and functioning into question.

Indeed, the 2000s witnessed a lively debate on educational policy and politics in Germany in the aftermath of the international OECD-PISA studies of school performance (the so-called PISA shock), with consequences such as lengthened schooldays and more accountability (Pfahl and Powell 2005). However, within the discussion of rising standards, international competition, and educational choice it remained difficult to raise public awareness for the issues of special schools, inclusive education and human rights. Yet legal battles surrounding inclusive education and parental rights of school choice (enshrined in the German Constitution but dependent on the *Länder* provision of funds) have intensified since the German legislature ratified the International Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (Article 24) in early 2009.

Bringing our discourse analysis up to the present, a countrywide initiative in Germany demands one 'school for all' (*eine Schule für Alle*).[1] A range of justifications for school integration and inclusive education has been prevalent in the discourse and we briefly review these here. The first reason refers to the necessity for human beings to learn how important social inclusion is, including the full participation of disabled people. Because of the ubiquitous segregation of disabled children and youth, fewer contacts and experiences are possible with peers, such that each new generation grows up with limited experience of the variety of human abilities. As mentioned above, special schools in Germany cannot withstand accountability exercises that measure their outputs, especially when measured in certificates earned, or outcomes, namely labour market exclusion or marginalization (see Pfahl and Powell 2010). The existence of special schools facilitates social selection processes, easing the removal of all those children thought to be 'abnormal'. This results in the overrepresentation of those social groups least able to self-advocate or challenge professional recommendations, namely

poor children and many non-German children (albeit with large differences by nationality and migration experience, see Gabel et al. 2009). Especially given the importance accorded vocational qualifications (*Berufe*) in Germany for individual identities and employment careers, every citizen should be provided with opportunities to contribute vocationally and participate in society. Lastly, proponents argue that more diversity in schooling benefits all children.

The tenacious ideology of innate talent inspires the selection into groups of differential status, who are then distributed after only four to maximally six school years among stratified secondary school types, which are defined as 'appropriate' for the ascribed intellectual level – and rigidly predetermine which further education pathways will be available due to school-leaving certificates of vastly different value. This structuration of schooling undergirds the illusion that the groups of pupils are homogenous, which also hinders the acknowledgment of individual differences and the pedagogical strategies and support to meet individual learning goals. Yet this is the key to inclusive schooling, which assumes that each and every learner, with particular characteristics and experiences, will follow a particular developmental trajectory.

But even school integration would counter the traditional school system structure in Germany as it reifies and reproduces existing class boundaries (see Wocken 2000). This differentiation into segregated school types on the basis of social class background runs counter to meritocratic and to democratic ideals of equality (see Solga 2009). The last strand of discourse, reflecting the rise of human rights to education, demands schooling to socialize and prepare each new cohort for active citizenship. Germany has only recently awakened to the importance of such investment, which also promises to be an effective policy to reduce 'educational poverty' (Allmendinger 1999) that so often leads to a host of negative consequences, from heightened risk of illness and disablement to lifelong dependence on social assistance. Thus, education and social policy must be viewed in concert much more than they have been, with the three key areas of disability policy – oriented to compensation, rehabilitation, and participation – understood not as separate but as complementary, since each addresses a relevant dimension of disablement and disability (see Maschke 2004). However, all these ideas, developed outside and within Germany over decades, seem only recently to be gaining credence within the special education profession. Wocken (2010) states that while it seems no one wants to be 'against' inclusive education, arguments brought forth to maintain the (segregationist) status quo are myriad: the 'homogeneity' argument stating that pupils attending a school must be alike, a defence of the continuum of special education organizational forms, a parental choice argument, and one focused on each individual child, which raises a plethora of problems that postpone systemic solutions.

From then to now: implications of special education discourse

In sum, our analysis has delineated special education's discourse formation of 'learning disability' in different phases, showing breaks, but mainly continuity, into the twenty-first century. This historical perspective, in which the facts and objectification of special education objects and terms are deconstructed, uncovered the taken-for-granted institutionalization of special schools – indeed, segregated schooling – and the discursive elements that led to their construction. The educational system is the social space in which the distribution of statements about pupils, teachers and

administrators as well as about learning, success, failure and performance coalesce. Knowledge about 'learning disability' can be understood through this distribution of statements, less via the subjective meaning that individual actors in complex educational systems ascribe within their educational practices. Aspects of 'true statements' about pupils and 'appropriate' schooling are especially important in analyzing educational discourses and in unmasking the legitimation effects of scientific discourses.

To do so, we charted the development of 'healing or therapeutic pedagogy' as a process of professionalization and of strategic professional interests. The first phase began after the establishment of compulsory education and facilitated a century of dramatic special education expansion up to the present day. Teachers interested in social equality began to teach children from the strata of migrant workers and the *Lumpenproletariat*, which had remained excluded from the modernized educational system of the Prussian monarchy. Growing beyond single organizations serving disabled children, special classes and schools were founded and the special education profession established itself nationwide after 1900. During and after the post-WWII expansion, the profession succeeded in expanding teacher training in university departments nationwide. As the number of special education schools exploded tenfold in the 1960s, the national classification of special educational needs was differentiated and segregated special schooling was supplemented with a system of special vocational training. This was meant to organize the transition of special school leavers into a segregated and highly subsidized labour market, including vocational programs and workshop settings. From the 1980s onwards, the debate about integration and segregation intensified. While parental, disability and political groups carried out this conflict, a strong and entrenched scientific discourse, supported by practitioners with their vested interests, and drawing especially on the ideology of innate ability, dominated the public discourse on learning disability. The field of special education further expanded and cooperated across disciplines, co-founding the 'sciences of rehabilitation' (*Rehabilitationswissenschaften*). Here too, the academic development, research specialisations and department chairs were built to correspond to existing school types. Teachers, largely through their influential professional associations, succeeded in exerting influence on politics and public administration and effectively articulated their interests in educating disabled pupils almost exclusively in segregated schools.

In Germany, the profession and its segregated schooling organizations create a parallel world that insulates its representatives from accountability or criticism, which they often perceive as an external threat to their objective and subjective interests and their identities. This construction of special education is a scientific articulation of the nineteenth century idea of a particular societal distribution of innate talent that demands the 'protection' of the most disadvantaged pupils from the insults and dangers of capitalist society, from excessive educational demands and expectations as well as from themselves. At the same time, school segregation – and the resulting divergent life chances – is seen as protecting 'society' from dangerous underprivileged individuals, even as social class and dis/ability boundaries are reproduced.

The special education profession and school structures in Germany exhibit remarkable historical continuity. Firstly, professional perspectives understand pupils as needy but also as individually deviant, despite changes in categorical labels – from individual impairments before the 1950s to school types during the special school expansion to

pedagogical support categories since 1994 (see Powell 2011). A further change on the surface has been the renaming of the professional association from that of support or special schools to the Special Education Association (*Verband deutscher Sonderpädagogik*). Despite such discursive shifts, however, and of considerable consequence for life chances, the treatment of pupils classified in the 'learning disability' category continues to build on segregation as 'appropriate' – even 'necessary'. This continuity in disciplinary knowledge and praxis is all the more remarkable given the nadir of the Third Reich, the Allied occupying forces that attempted but largely failed to establish a democratic school system in West Germany, and considerable international pressures to implement school integration – or, most recently, to restructure the educational system to be inclusive (UN 2006).

The interests of those who work in well-resourced special schools and earn higher salaries than general schoolteachers have hindered change and continue to do so, as does the lack of political will to redirect funding and professional talent from special schools to inclusive education programs. Thus, despite considerable local successes, in most regions of Germany inclusive schools remain exceptional. The profession of special education – and learning disability as a specialization – has from the beginning based its authority on a specific school form that copied the model of German general education, namely a stratified, multi-tiered school system. The general and special schools share a common vision of the pedagogical necessity of gathering pupils into supposedly homogenous groups according to innate abilities, however defined by the education profession's contemporary knowledge base.

The professional construction of learning disability focuses on 'healing individual intellectual deficits' of pupils. Segregated educational environments, viewed by educators as providing special support by offering a 'comforting or protective space' or 'safe territory' (*Schonraum*), effectively cap the educational achievements and attainments and personal development of their pupils, yet their legitimacy is maintained by the discourse that reifies 'learning disability'. The professional associations participate in the scientific definition and the development of categories and practices and have, over the past hundred years, been highly influential in constructing, differentiating and maintaining a classification system that undergirds separate special schools. Although a significant number of schools throughout Germany have successfully taught inclusively since pilot projects were first begun in the 1980s, according to most recent data from the Conference of Culture Ministers (*Kultusministerkonferenz*), the national average of pupils with special educational needs integrated in general schools was only 14% in 2006, placing Germany among the most segregated educational systems in Europe (see Powell 2011).

The legitimacy of special school segregation seems likely to continue despite attempts to reduce the number of general secondary school types in multi-tier, highly stratified educational systems. Paradoxically, school segregation rates have been increasing at the same time that inclusive education programs are gradually strengthened. Differences across the 16 *Länder* demonstrate that inclusive education is possible in Germany where the will exists to reform educational policies and practices to be more inclusive. As delineated here, a key factor in the continued growth of largely segregated special education is the unquestioned authority of the profession with respect to 'learning disability'. Special education's scientific discourse continues to legitimate the classification of pupils as 'learning disabled', which, given the school structures established over a century ago and maintained since, leads to segregated schooling instead of inclusive education.

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Note

1. See http://www.eine-schule-fuer-alle.info.

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